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ABSTRACT

The annual "10 Cents to Save a Life" program is a special event that has been held at Mount Ida College in Newton Centre, Massachusetts for two years. The purposes of the event include: (1) teaching the public relations class and communication majors applied public relations theory through both a fundraising campaign and an education campaign; (2) raising money for the UNICEF Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) program; and (3) educating the college's population on hunger issues. A faculty member at Mount Ida College assisted her students in setting up a program to raise the equivalent of 10 cents (the cost of an oral rehydration therapy packet) from each member of the college community. Students in the public relations class took over the project, under the supervision of the faculty member, and learned the amount of coordination and work that was required to mount a successful educational and advertising campaign. The financial goal was met both years. The major lesson that the faculty member learned from the event was the importance of letting go of the project once it was created. (RS)

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# *"10¢ To Save A Life: Ending Hunger as a Special Event"*

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**Description and Purpose**

**"10¢ to Save a Life" is a special event that has been held at Mount Ida College in Newton Centre, Ma. for the last two years. The purposes of "10¢ to Save a Life" include (1) teaching the Public Relations class and Communication majors applied Public Relations theory through both a fundraising campaign and an education campaign, (2) raising money for the UNICEF ORT program, (3) educating the college's population in the distinction between famine (10%) and Chronic Persistent Hunger (90%) as the causes of hunger and starvation and educating the college's population on hunger-related issues so that each member of the college community can be empowered to take steps towards the ending of hunger.**

**The program began as a brainchild of mine about 1:00 am two mornings after we'd had an Ending Hunger Presentation at the college. The Communication Club (of which I am the faculty advisor) had hosted several previous Ending Hunger Presentations quite successfully. That year (1989-1990), several sophomores had felt powerless and frustrated instead of empowered by the Ending Hunger Presentation. The program I proposed to my Public Relations class was a three-week advertising campaign followed by a one-day collection to raise money for Oral**

Rehydration Therapy. ORT is part of UNICEF's GOBI program (Growth charting, Oral Rehydration Therapy, Breastfeeding and Inoculation). Oral Rehydration Therapy consists of a package of a glucose/sodium/potassium solution which, when mixed with one liter of drinking water can prevent the victim of diarrhea (caused by hunger, disease, etc.) from dying of dehydration. Each packet costs approximately 10¢ to package and ship. Thus the title "10¢ to Save a Life." The first year, I asked my class (without offering any credit!) if they would be interested in running such a program. Our goal would be to raise 10¢ and save a life for each member of the college community - each student, faculty and staff member. They took over the project.

Someone in the class realized that vacation was two weeks away. I suggested we do the project after vacation. They insisted we do it before (cutting off one week of needed advertising.) I suggested that we solicit the donations outside the resident cafeteria one day during lunch and dinner. They insisted we solicit donations both lunch and dinner, in the resident and commuter cafeterias for five days. In brief, the first year the students took over the project with me as a supervisor. This last year, the Public Relations class was primarily responsible for the project.

My work study students were assistants. Two other student groups (besides the Communication Club) volunteered to assist. Only one, Sigma Tau Omega, a college fraternity actually assisted. Both years the collections grew from just the resident and commuter cafeteria to collections at the college's main switchboard and at the library (at the insistence of the head switchboard operator and the librarians).

We exceeded our financial goals each year. We succeeded in educating more students about ending hunger the second year than the first. We also succeeded in teaching my Public Relations students the application of many of the skills and managerial techniques that they had learned "in theory" in the classroom.

## Pedagogical Value

As an individual committed to ending hunger, I would have found the project valuable if all it had done was educate the college population about ending hunger. The pedagogical value of the project for both the Public Relations students and the Communication majors was immense. This next section will be devoted to discussing highlights of applied theory and techniques.

The first management technique my PR students learned to apply was the PERT chart. Students in both

years had studied the PERT chart but were unclear on the application. The planning of both the advertising and education campaigns as well as the fundraising events allowed my students to grasp managerial planning as a necessity when planning and implementing complex campaigns. Another advantage of the PERT chart was that it called forth in the students the need to brainstorm all possible actions and potential results in order to create all aspects of the event. Students develop an appreciation of more complex special events when a five-day fundraiser requires such detailed planning.

Conducting an educational campaign is not a topic generally highlighted by most Public Relations textbooks. In order to raise the money we wanted to raise, we needed to educate the students on what Oral Rehydration Therapy was. We doubled all educational material as advertising for either the fundraising or the Ending Hunger Presentation (the second year). The second year we held an Ending Hunger Week at the college which included the fundraising and the Ending Hunger Presentation.

The advertising campaign educated not only the students, but also the professor. The students learned the amount of coordination and work that was required to successfully mount an educational and advertising campaign

at the college. I learned that the best place to put material you want students to read is in the bathroom stalls. To quote my students, "it's a captive audience." I was amazed the second year at the success of the educational campaign (using mostly the same advertising). A much larger portion of the resident population knew what ORT was - as a result of the "stall campaign." It's labor-intensive, but I recommend it.

Evaluation is also a concept discussed in our texts, but often a "concept" not a reality for our Public Relations students. My personal system of evaluation has four steps: (1) What worked, (2) What didn't work, (3) the next step for what worked, and (4) the next step for what didn't work. Step number three is unusual for most evaluation systems and one which requires a stronger degree of analytical thinking from my students. When students are required to consider what they would do to improve what had worked, they develop a stronger appreciation for evaluation as a tool rather than a blame/judgement mechanism.

During the 1991-1992 academic year, the Communication Club is going to issue a challenge to the rest of the approximately 100 degree-granting institutions in Massachusetts to conduct their own "10¢ To Save a Life"

campaign to raise 10¢ for each member of the college community.

I have also now been trained to lead Ending Hunger Presentations and will be offering Presentations through the college's Health Management courses twice a semester. The possibility is that most members of the college community will have been exposed to information on ending hunger and the distinction between famine and chronic persistent hunger before graduating from the two-and three-year associate degree programs. This will change the complexion of Ending Hunger Week at the college and will probably cause an evolution in "10¢ to Save a Life" at Mount Ida over the next two years.

## Future Evolution

Each year, "10¢ to Save a Life" has presented different challenges and lessons to both the students and the professor. The first year, our evaluation indicated that we needed a larger and more diverse group of collectors and participants. The second year we had a larger and more diverse group and discovered that we could use even more participants. The work seems to expand with the size of the student groups participating. The first year we discovered that my belief that we'd need three weeks for successful advertising proved true. The second year, the three weeks

were adequate. Each year, because of the large turnover of students in a two plus two college, the educational campaign has had to assume that the students had no background in ending hunger and ORT. With the possibility of my giving Ending Hunger Presentations on an ongoing basis at the college is the possibility of the student population being more diverse in ending hunger education. This last year, the head of the Library had a full display on Ending Hunger as part of Ending Hunger week. The first year the "rolling" of the change was done by a core group of dedicated students who were committed to the job. The second year found a more laissez-faire attitude toward rolling the change and therefore it became a burden.

As stated, we raised the money we intended both years. Given this as a goal (raising the equivalent of 10¢ for each member of the college community), the purpose - saving a life for each member of the college community - was met the first year, met and exceeded the second year. $235.50 and $302.00 don't seem like large sums of money but 2,355 lives and 3020 lives are powerful numbers.

The one major lesson that I learned from "10¢ to Save a Life"was the importance of letting go of the project once it was created. The first year, the students took over the project. That does not mean that I did not do a lot of work.

**It did mean that I became a co-creator of the project with my students. The second year, many other members of the college community became co-creators. I imagine that it would be easier to create and contain such a project if I hadn't "let go" and allowed people to contribute their ideas. With my becoming "co-creator" of my own project, "10¢ to Save a Life" is sometimes more like riding a bucking bronco than conducting a special event. I have a great deal of experience in conducting successful special events. What I wasn't trained to do was ride a bucking bronco! However, by allowing the project to create itself (while keeping the purpose and objectives on target), "10¢ to Save a Life" is a project which now belongs to the Communication majors. The lessons from "10¢ to Save a Life" continue to delight and amaze me - both those the students are learning and those the professor is learning! I hadn't truly expected that 1:00 a.m. brainstorm born out of frustration to save lives and create all the purposes that it did. I'm looking forward to learning what lessons "10¢ to Save a Life" and my students have to teach me next year.**

**NB: If you'd like more information on conducting a "10¢ to Save a Life" campaign at your college, please contact the author at Mount Ida College, 777 Dedham Street, Newton Centre, MA 02159.**